

Swastikas found at both the middle and high schools

Stephens addresses Nazi symbols with 'outrage'

By Susanna Sheehan
Clipper Editor

Last week, the Duxbury school department responded swiftly to two swastikas that had been drawn in a middle school bathroom and on bleachers in the high school gym, and quickly identified the people responsible.

Both Duxbury High School Principal Andrew Stephens and Duxbury School Superintendent Dr. Benedict Tantillo sent emails to parents of school children informing them of the swastikas. Tantillo's email, which was sent on Friday, May 26, said the schools had found out who had drawn the swastikas, which is a symbol associated with Adolf Hitler's Nazi party in Germany in WWII. They were a Duxbury Middle School student and a Duxbury High School student, said Duxbury Police Chief Matthew Clancy. The incidents were unrelated, he said.

"This week there were two swastikas found in our co-located middle and high school," stated Tantillo in his email. "One was found in a middle school lavatory and the other in the high school gymnasium. We are disappointed and outraged at these two incidents. In each case, the perpetrator has been identified and has faced serious appropriate consequences according our district's code of conduct. In addition, the school resource officer has met with the students to determine if any legal action will be taken."

In his email on Thursday, May 25, high school principal Stephens said the swastika on the bleachers was "prominently drawn and in a very public place" and was done sometime between Wednesday and Thursday. Stephens said he was "outraged" by these actions and swiftly addressed the issue by making an announcement over the public address system in both schools.

"Ladies and gentleman, if I sound angry and outraged, it is because I am," Stephens said in his address. "In order to understand the outrage that I feel and I hope that you feel right now, it is fair that you understand the significance of this action and why I am responding so strongly."

He continued: "Symbols have tremendous meaning in our lives. Symbols often represent complicated and deeply held beliefs and values. The swastika, as it applies to contemporary society, represents the values and beliefs of a group of people that deeply believed that one race was superior to all other races and ethnic groups and used that reasoning as a basis for the starting of World War II and the deliberate murder of over six million Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and political dissidents – in other words, people who were different than the dominant group that used the swastika as the symbol to reflect its philosophy. The swastika is not a symbol of unity or peace or love. It is a symbol of hate and intolerance. The federal government agrees with (this) interpretation of what the swastika represents."

Drawing swastikas as a form of graffiti can constitute a hate crime, said Stephens.

"In addition to significant school-based consequences, the putting of swastikas on any public or private property can fall under federal legislation as a hate crime," explained Stephens. "The police have been notified and...the person or persons who did this could face prosecution for a hate crime for which the penalties are severe."

"More importantly, to have a symbol that represents such intolerance and hatred for racial, ethnic and religious difference written on the bleachers of our school should outrage us as human

beings. As members of a community that is made up of many different peoples, it is my hope that you, too, are outraged at such an act, because this is an insult to every one of us in this community. It is our belief that we have the responsibility as human beings to act when we see or know about such behavior. This is not to say that you take matters into your own hands. It means that in no way should you acknowledge such people through laughter or praise, and it means that if you know who did this, that you would take responsibility and tell someone in this building. My hope is that this gets you to think about what our school and what our town should stand for.”

Stephens said his strong message to students was designed to show that there was “no place” for actions like this in Duxbury’s schools, but he also recognized that the reaction to the swastikas could be used as a “teachable moment.”

“While this is an unfortunate incident, there is much learning that can result from discussing what this means to us as individuals and as a school community,” he said.

Tantillo said that Stephens’ words “speak for our entire district.”

Duxbury Police Chief Clancy said the police are investigating both incidents to determine if the students will be arrested and charged with a crime.

“We’re doing our investigation to see if we have any violations of state laws,” he said. “Based on the result of that, two youths may be entered into the juvenile court system.”

“Both events are not connected at all,” Clancy said, adding that “there are two individual kids and there is no indication that other kids were involved.

The chief said that one of the students who drew the swastikas went to school administration and admitted the wrongdoing after Stephens broadcast his message.

Clancy would not say if the juveniles were male or female and did not rush to call the actions a hate crime.

“We are looking at the elements of that but let’s dial it back to the more basic of what it is – it’s a property crime,” he said.

While he wouldn’t describe the size of the swastikas nor what they were drawn with, Clancy did say they were “very small little renderings” that were able to be erased.

“It doesn’t appear that there was actual damage done,” he said. “In both cases, it was very quickly cleaned up.”